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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND  
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND  
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SUBJECT: Peace Process, Lebanon, Syria/Iran, Syria/Iraq,  
Abbas-Olmert-Rice Meeting (2/21)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on Feb. 21 featured statements on the importance of achieving peace in the Middle East and boosting the peace process. The papers featured an article published by Spanish newspaper El-Pais on Feb.20 which said that Spanish PM Zapatero and Italian PM Prodi stressed the necessity of holding an international conference to achieve peace in the Middle East through dialogue and negotiations. The two PMs hailed the Mecca Accord between Hamas and Fateh, referring to their decisive stance to help resume negotiations on the Palestinian- Israeli track. Papers also cited another statement by Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi in a meeting on Feb. 20 at the Italian Embassy in the Vatican with a Vatican delegation headed by Vatican Prime Minister Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone. PM Prodi reiterated the importance of rallying joint efforts to boost Middle East peace and face the problems of developing countries in cooperation with the UN and the EU.

The Director General of the Contemporary Strategic Studies Center in Russia, Rejeb Savarov, also underlined that the peace process in the Middle East will continue to be a failure and unsuccessful without Syria. "Ignoring the Syrian role in the Middle East is one of the main reasons that blocked peace talks," the Russian Expert said on Feb. 20 in an interview by Russian TV Agency (Vesti). Savarov underscored that Russia is one of the main factors in the Middle East, so "any talks on the region will be unfruitful without Russian participation." "Despite the background of US failure in Iraq and Afghanistan and with the increasing opposition to its policy in the region and in the world, America still wishes to obtain a success in the Middle East, but its conditions are unrealistic, because it seeks to protect Israel," Savarov concluded.

On the Lebanese issue, papers reported that Lebanese President Emile Lahoud voiced full support on Feb. 20 for every initiative aimed at solving the Lebanese political crisis. During a meeting with Lebanese ex-premier Salim al-Hoss, Lahoud called upon the Lebanese to unify ranks in facing all foreign plots targeting their national unity. For his part, al-Hoss reviewed with Lahoud results of his visits to Syria and Saudi Arabia, describing the visits as positive.

End of summary.

## 12. Selected Headlines:

"Spanish PM Zapatero and Italian PM Romano Prodi reiterate the importance of holding an international conference on Middle East peace. Moscow: the tripartite meeting did not result in any decision" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 2/21)

"Israeli Foreign Minister Livini opposes dialogue with Palestinians, and Condoleezza Rice markets this decision in Arab countries" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/21)

"Former Lebanese Premier Salim al-Hoss: Lebanon is on the verge of explosion - the government is the reason. The Lebanese opposition holds the governing team responsible for blocking initiatives" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 2/21)

"Lebanese anger at US intervention: The current government is responsible for foiling initiatives" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/21)

"Blair announces withdrawal of British troops from Iraq" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/21)

"Tehran is ready to offer guarantees. Chief of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Mohammed El Baradei meets with Iranian Chief Nuclear Negotiator Ali Larijani, who invites the West for dialogue: Iran has reached an advanced technological stage; no return to the past" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 2/21)

"US senior officials unveil an attack plan against Iran" (Government-owned Tishreen, 2/21)

## 13. Editorial Block Quotes:

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"In One Trench"

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Omar Jaftali, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (2/21): "When Syria, more than 28 years ago, began establishing the best of relations with Iran as a friendly country supporting Arab causes..., many in the Arab world were apprehensive about that Syrian approach. Some even blamed Syria, but they later acknowledged the soundness of its position and the accuracy of its strategic vision, stressing that Iran is an integral part of the region's Arab and Islamic body. And because Iran has that characteristic, it was placed within the range of the American-Israeli plan, which targets the region from Lebanon to Afghanistan.

"This targeting, which reached the stage of direct occupation of Iraq and imposition of siege on the region by fleets and warplanes, proved that Syria and Iran were right: The next stage will be more dangerous if the repercussions of the past few years are not heeded by everyone. The colonial plans are prepared in Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and they set their objectives on the basis of division of the Islamic world and sedition among Muslims. This means that the situation is very delicate and tolerates no mistakes or rifts. Syria and Iran realized those hostile scenarios, and this led to cooperation and coordination between the two countries on the highest levels to confront the dangers that threaten not only Syria and Iran and the region, but also the Arab and Islamic nations at large...."

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"The Pirate Wants Dialogue"

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Abd-al-Fattah al-Awad, Chief Editor of government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (2/20): "The United States is like a pirate who threw people into the sea and then started shouting for people to come save them! What is even worse is that this pirate is shouting all kinds of sympathetic and human words: Please come save these people; I

appeal to you in the name of compassion to come help them...!

"In its call for dialogue with Damascus over the issue of Iraqis in Syria, the US wants to discuss the consequences only. It wants to focus on the result, or even part of the result, and ignore the cause. It wants to discuss the symptoms, not the disease. The harmful disease is the presence of the occupation....

"Simply put, the dialogue that Syria wants is a dialogue that covers all issues, from Palestine to Iraq to Lebanon to every other issue of concern to the Arab countries....

"US officials always say that Syria knows what it must do. But the problem is that the Bush Administration does not know what it must do. What is worse, it wants others to do what it must do....

"The Syrian policy insists on a serious and thorough dialogue on all issues of the region without exception. It focuses on the reasons and wants to address the root causes of the problems, not just their consequences and repercussions.

"The attempt to dwarf the Iraqi issue by turning it into merely a humanitarian problem that concerns refugees is less than an attempt to throw dust in the eyes...."

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"Chance for Testing"

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Sa'id Musallam, an op-ed writer in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (2/21): "Rice and Olmert announced before their meeting that the United States and Israel would boycott the forthcoming Palestinian

government. Therefore, the meeting produced disappointing results, which is not new.... What is important now is how the world is going to react.

"What will be the reaction of the European, Islamic, and Arab countries that adopted the Mecca Accord and supported the national unity government that will result from it...?

"What will be the position of Russia, China, Germany, and the United Nations in the Quartet meeting that will be held within a few days in the German capital?"

"Will the US Administration be convinced of the need to respect the Palestinian people's choices and remove the siege on them? And, finally, who will protect the agreement between brothers from the penetration of the hawks who are thirsty for sedition, infighting, and divisions in our region?"

"This is a real test for the main forces in the world and a chance to learn the truth and say it. Is there room for justice?"

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"Meeting for the Sake of Meeting"

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Ghazi al-Dada, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (2/21): "The Abbas-Olmert-Rice meeting was characterized by a great deal of talk and little action: total absence of the main and pressing Palestinian issues, such as occupied Jerusalem, refugees, and the independent state, and strong presence of the repeated impossible Israeli conditions that are wrapped as 'Quartet conditions' and of the negative and vague American position....

"The preconceived Israeli positions, which are identical with the American positions, doomed the meeting to failure in advance and rendered it void before it started....

"In the full absence of any tangible results from the trilateral meeting and the strong presence of the absolute American support for Israel, Tel Aviv will continue to plant mines in the way of formation of the Palestinian government. And after the formation of this government, Israel will do everything it can to maintain the

siege on the Palestinian people in an attempt to bring the  
Palestinians back to the climate of tension.... Palestinians must  
show maximum vigilance to foil these Israeli attempts...."

Corbin